Analyzing Trends of Racism in Black Metal

Photo taken at Asgardsrei, a neo nazi metal festival previously held in Moscow, now held in Ukraine. Source

Introduction

As a regular listener of black metal, I commonly have the experience of finding a cool new band and really loving their material, only to later learn that the members are nazis, or the music itself celebrates nazism or similar repugnant beliefs such as white supremacy (now referred to more generally as racist[1] for the rest of this post).

I know I'm not the only one who has had to deal with the frustration of constantly coming across racist bands in black metal. Because of this, I've begun to wonder: how common are racist beliefs in black metal?

[1] I use racist as it is the best term (that comes to mind) to encompass all people who hold some variety of these beliefs.

Methods

(For those interested solely in the results and interpretation of this project, skip to the next section.)

To answer the preceding question, I looked to the Metal Archives. The Metal Archives (MA) is a wiki for metal, having a page for almost every single metal band to have existed and released some material. The information on it is entirely crowdsourced, with a team of moderators and administrators making sure no false information is inputted. As of January 2023, it has a page for each of over 163,000 metal bands [1]. Recorded on these pages is a list of all of the releases each band has, when they formed, who their band members are, the genre of metal they play, and a variety of other subjects. Relevant to my enquiries, however, is the lyrical themes field. Here, it describes what the lyrics of the band are generally about. Importantly, this includes if the lyrics involve racist themes.

MA also has information on the members of a band. Important to the work here is the information on who is currently a member of a band, who used to be a member of a band, and who plays live for a band.

To start this project, I first got access to MA's publicly available data. One can do this by reaching out to the owners of the site (Hellblazer and Morrigan). The data I got is what is listed on the MA page for each band and each artist. I then integrated this data with a MongoDB database for easy access and use. The data used is from June of 2020.

After this, I set about labeling which bands are racist. This was done using the lyrical themes section of each band's MA page, which are crowd sourced. If a band had any of the following in their lyrical themes, I labeled them as racist:

National Socialism (Nazi)
White Nationalism
Anti-Semitism
Racialism
White Supremacy
Hitlerism
Aryanism
Esoteric Hitlerism
White Pride
Nazism (Specifically excluding anti-nazism)
Fascism (Specifically excluding anti-fascist)

From here, I proceeded to make three graphs from the data, where each vertex corresponded to a band, and each edge corresponding to whether two bands shared a currently active member, used to share a band member, or a member of one band played live for another band.

One graph just had edges for when they shared active band members, another had edges for when two bands shared active or past members, and the other had edges for all three cases.

I then used these graphs to find out whether or not each band shared band members in some way with racist bands. Using this information, I was able to determine not only what percent of black metal bands have racist themes, but also what percent of bands share band members with racist bands.

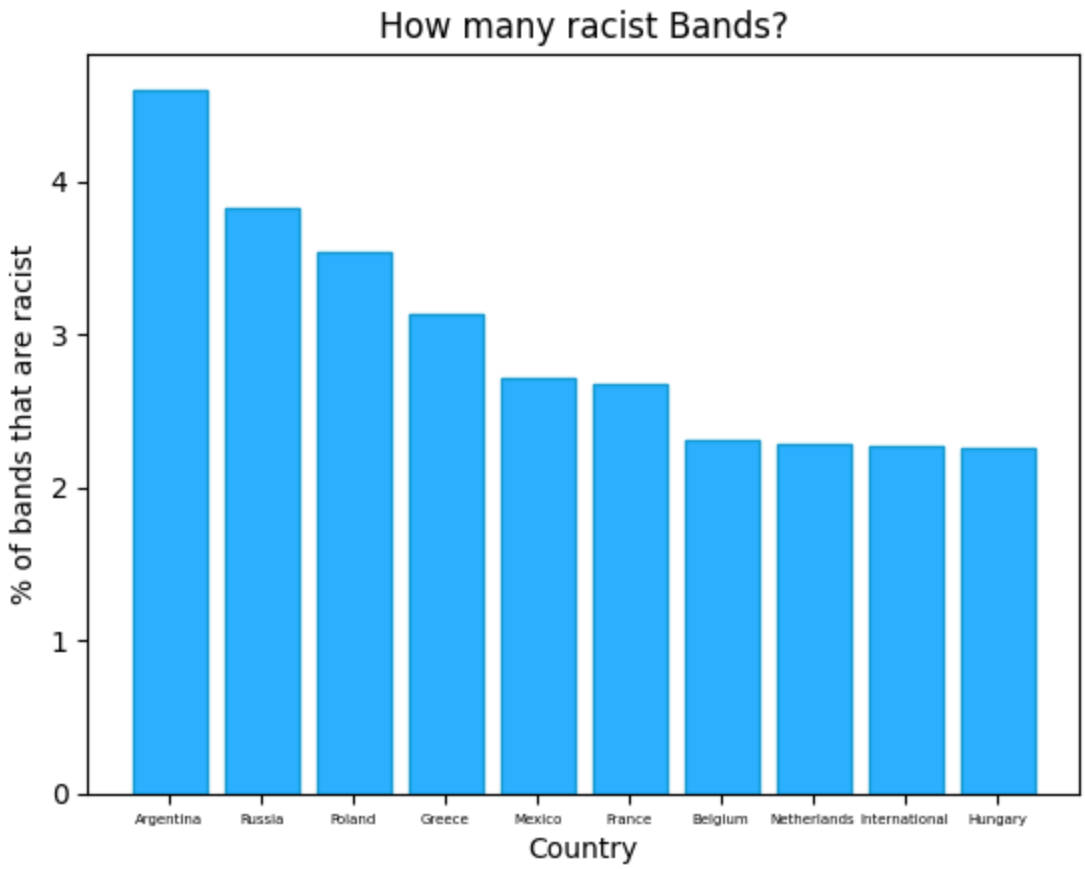
Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Graphs, Tables, Exposition

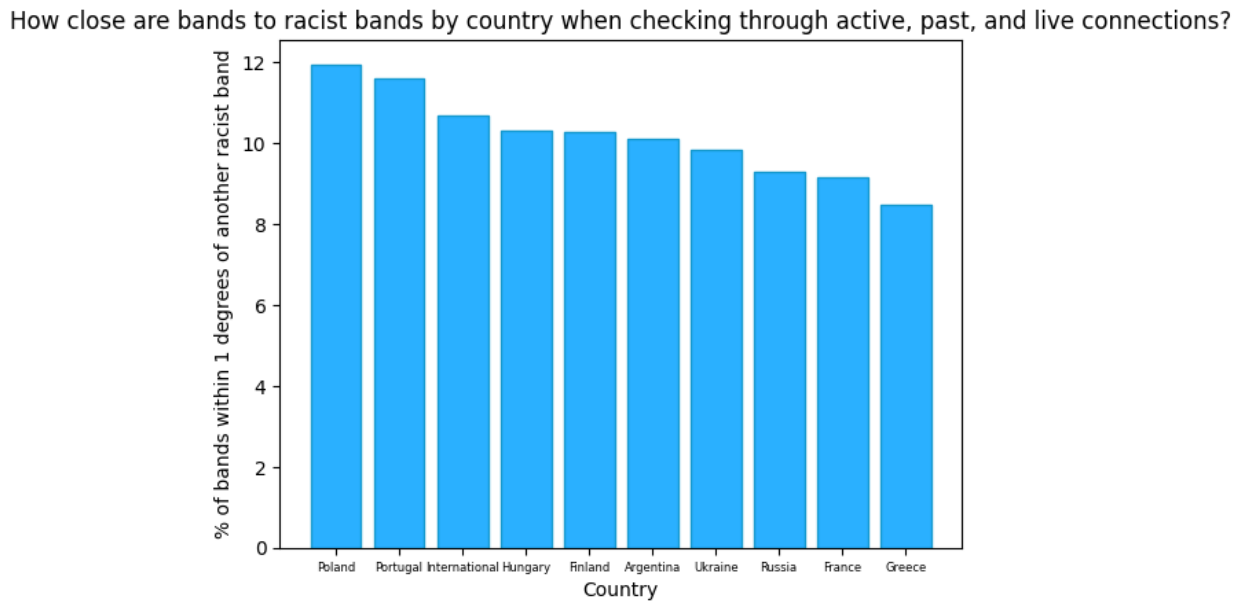
Note: Racist Black Metal Band = RBMB

Breakdown By Countries

This graph shows which 10 countries have the highest proportion of racist black metal bands relative to the total number of black metal bands in that country. (# RBMBs / # BM bands per country)



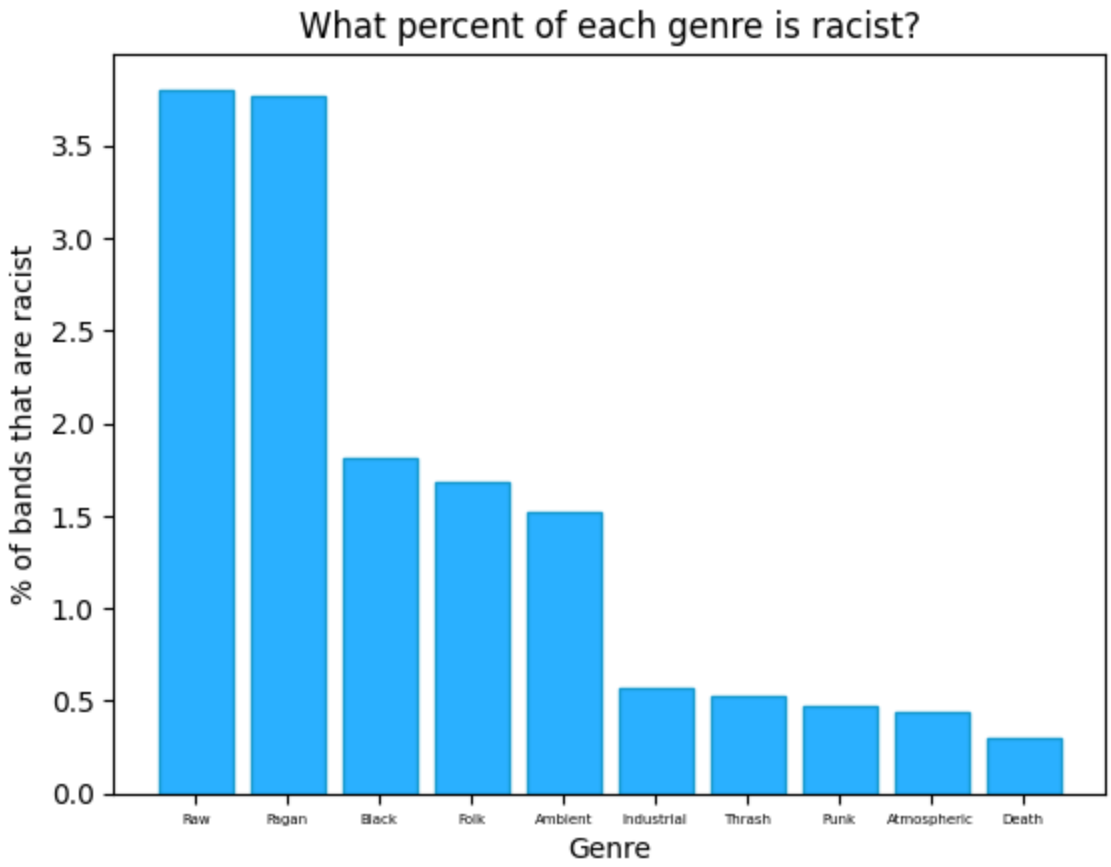
This graph shows which 10 countries have the highest amount of racist black metal and bands which share an active, past, or live member with racist black metal bands relative to the total number of black metal bands in that country. (#RBMBs + #Bands that share an active, past or live member with an RBMB) / #BM bands



When broken down by country, we can see that Argentina by far has the highest percent of bands with racist themes in its black metal scene. This is followed by Russia, Poland, then Greece. As the scope of bands is expanded, Argentina, Russia, and Greece are less represented, with Poland, Portugal, International bands, and Hungary having a slightly higher percent of racist bands

Breakdown By Black Metal Subgenre

This graph shows which 10 black metal subgenres have the highest proportion of racist black metal and bands which share an active, past, or live member of racist black metal bands. (#RBMBs + # Bands that share an active, past or live member with an #RBMB) / #BM bands



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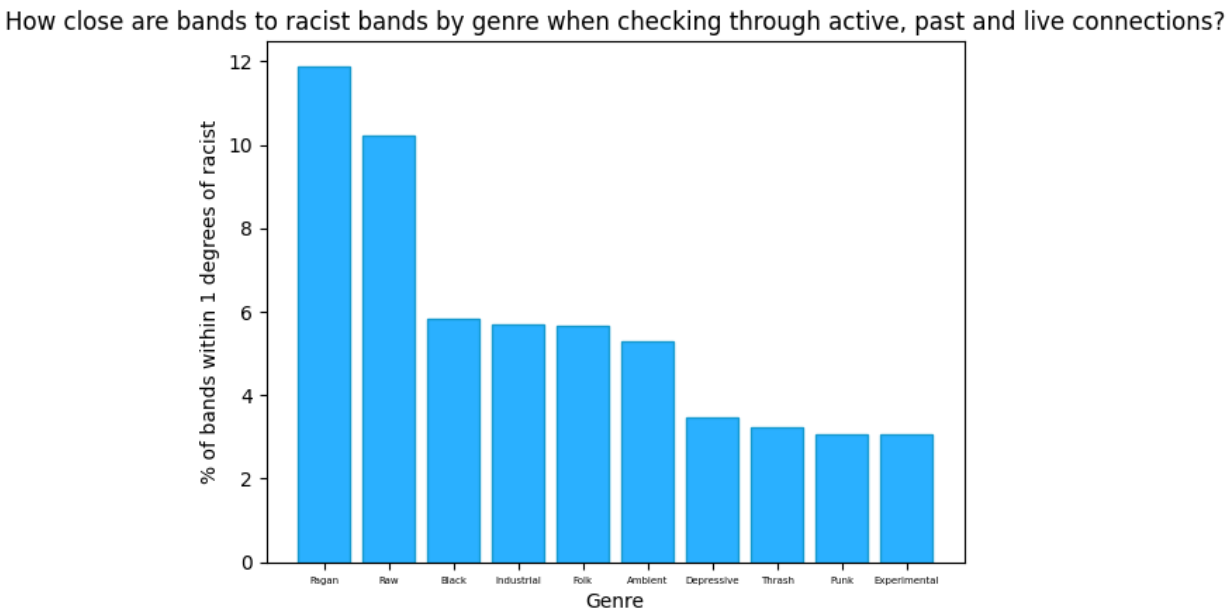

Breaking down by genre, we get a much cleaner story. Across all metrics, raw black metal and pagan black metal are both overwhelmingly responsible for the prevalence of racist bands in black metal. Only when checking by active connections is there another genre which is above the baseline for % with racist themes.

Observations and Hypotheses

There are clearly trends in this data, with certain countries and subgenres clearly having more racist bands than others. Here, I will point out some of these trends.

One thing that can be noticed in breakdowns by country is that several of the countries were part of the USSR or the Eastern Bloc in general. These include Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Hungary.

On Argentina's prevalence in these graphs, it is well known that thousands of Nazis fled to the country after WWII. This may give reason for how many racist bands Argentina has. However, other South American countries such as Brazil also had many Nazis flee to them, but they don't have nearly the number of racist bands that Argentina does [2].

It is unclear to me why Portugal has so many racist bands. I personally believe it may be due to the fact that it was ruled by a fascist dictator until the mid/early 70s, but its neighbor Spain was ruled by a fascist dictator for even longer, yet Spain doesn't even show up on any of the charts.

References

[1] Metal Archives
[2] Nazis in Latin America